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## At NBC,

## a Prime-Time Saturday Newscast

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NBC is quietly preparing to unveil a major extension of its news schedule in the fall: a 30-minute Saturday evening

news roundup in the format of the famous Huntley-Brinkley Report.

A new team has been created for the weekend newscast. Robert MacNeil, an NBC

correspondent in Washington, will be brought to New York to anchor the report from here. David Brinkley's Saturday counterpart from Washington will be Ray Scherer.

another NBC newsman long on the capital beat.

The program will be called "The Scherer-MacNeil Report." It will be introduced the week of Sept. 13.

The TV networks often have been criticized in the past by FCC officials and others for not scheduling more newscasts on weekends.

The NBC project is the first significant answer to this criticism in the pre-11 p. m. hours. CBS has long had a Sunday night late-evening 15-minute news roundup. ABC last month inaugurated 15-minute newscasts Saturday and Sunday nights at 11.

"The Scherer-MacNeil Report" will replace a 15-minute early Saturday evening NBC newscast formerly handled by Sander Vanocur and currently rotated among various newsmen including Scherer and MacNeil.

The 30-minute roundup will make more use of NBC's foreign and domestic correspondents than does the Huntley-Brinkley Report. NBC staffer Nancy Dickerson probably will be seen often from the Washington end. Jim Simpson will report sports out of New York.

The program will be fed to the network at 6:30 p. m., but might be carried in New York or elsewhere at 7 on tape.

It will not replace any present network programming other than the 15-minute news. Local stations have programmed the other quarter-hour.

NBC is understood already to have received good clearance for the new half-hour project from affiliated stations.

## Tell Me Why...

Some of television's most experienced heads are shaking in growing dismay these days.

Their owners say they just don't know, any more, what the public is going to take a fancy to.

Take "Gilligan's Island," they usually say. One of the most awful shows that ever hit the small screen. It's just too inane for words.

And it's one of the season's hits.

Or sometimes these worried experts point at "Gomer Pyle"

and say, "How could that be one of the highest rated new series to come along this year?"

"Bewitched," they tend to concede, was recognized instantly, when its pilot film made the rounds of the networks, as an undoubted smash. It seemed fresh and genuinely funny.

"Peyton Place," they agree, is accountable as a success. It simply transferred the emotional appeal of soap opera from daytime to evening hours. Why had nobody done it before?

But "Gilligan's Island"? How did you account for that?

And now, to add to the confusion, another ratings wonder has turned up. "Branded," a half-hour western NBC threw in Sunday nights in midseason when Bill Dana's show floundered, is giving the old TV warhorse, Ed Sullivan, serious competition.

In two out of its first five weeks on the air, "Branded" actually outrated Sullivan's variety hour during the half-



NBC's Ray Scherer (left) and Robert MacNeil: Saturday offsprings of Huntley-Brinkley.

hour of their direct competition.

"People probably don't know," one wit suggested, "but what they are watching the first half of 'Bonanza'!" "Bonanza," immediately following "Branded," is the head-and-shoulders giant of the ratings race.

Because of this juxtaposition, another was thought NBC might skunk Sullivan even more with blurbs saying, "For a real bonanza of fun, watch Chuck Connors in 'Branded'! See Connors get knocked off his hoss!"

But "Branded" is really no laughing matter. It's about a Union Army cavalry officer drummed out of the service for cowardice and on the lam in the Old West. In short, The Fugitive on horseback.

One theory is that TV audiences are more in the mood for drama than comedy as alternative to Sullivan. Before Bill Dana's show, Sullivan was more or less the undoing of Imogene Coca's "Grindl" and of "Car 54."

Another theory is that "Branded" caters better to the Walt Disney fans in the hour preceding it.

Bill Todman, partner in

Goodson-Todman, producers of the new western, had still another explanation yesterday. "We got this show together in unusually fast time," he said, "but I like to think Goodson-Todman have won a reputation for being meticulous, and we've tried to make this as good as we possibly could. It think you've got to give a lot of credit to Chuck. He's a good actor and a very zealous worker."

Todman disclosed that the series will begin a three-part drama filmed in color this Sunday. The three episodes will be edited into a theatrical movie for distribution abroad by Columbia Pictures.

Meanwhile, CBS has paid NBC that sincerest form of flattery by announcing a back-to-back scheduling next fall of a new Rod Serling-authored half-hour western just preceding Saturday night's "Gunsmoke."